SOME REFLEXIONS ON THE SCHEME at present adopted by PARLIAMENT For giving Relief to ROMAN CATHOLICS:

Wherein the inexpediency of that Measure especially with regard to SCOTLAND is pointed out.

By a Friend to the Protestant Establishment in CHURCH and STATE.

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SOME REFLEXIONS, &c.

IT is not the design of these Reflexions to enter into a detail of the errors and dangers of the Roman Catholic Persuasion: that is left to such as are more versant in these enquiries, or to some future opportunity, and treating this Subject at present merely as a question in politics; it is intended barely to mention some of these things, which if duly considered and their consequences attended to, may be sufficient to show that the scheme of granting such a relief to Papists as that pursued at present, is highly inexpedient.

Unanimity in religious opinion is undoubtedly eagerly wished for by all who regard the good of human society: such harmony in principle would certainly have an happy influence in giving a higher degree of regularity to the actions of man, and greater stability to the Public-weal.—

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But that ignorance and imperfection which unavoidably adheres to human nature in its preſent ſtate, will, it is to be feared, for ever prevent ſuch a deſirable event from fully taking place. Partial views, and of conſequence different ſentiments concerning abſtract principles, will always produce diſputes and contentions about religious ſyſtems.

Since then the nature of man is ſuch, that controverſies in religion cannot be entirely prevented; it becomes the duty of every Legiſlator to exert his utmoſt endeavours, by diverting the force and allaying the acrimony of religious diſputes, to alleviate the evil which he cannot fully remedy, and to employ every expedient to render theſe controverſies as few and as gentle as poſſible. In order to this the Legiſlator as far as the people under his inſpection are capable of it, ought to put all the different ſects in his dominions on an equal footing with reſpect to public protection and toleration. There are however certain reſtrictions and limitations to which the Magiſtrate muſt ſubmit his views, and by which he muſt regulate his endeavours in attempting to accompliſh even this laudable deſign.

The politician after having reſolved with himſelf what he would wiſh to bring men to, ought next to conſider what they really are, and what are the moſt likely methods of working upon

them, altho he may find in the courſe of theſe reſearches that there is nothing but ignorance and prejudice ſtanding in the way of his deſigns, yet even theſe muſt be treated with an appearance of reſpect and attention. Inſtead of openly attempting to drive men from errors which time and education have perhaps endeared to them, he will often find it more prudent to ſeem to comply with their views and to a certain length even to feel the power of the ſame prejudices by which they are enſlaved; and having once by theſe means gained their confidence, he may then avail himſelf of theſe very prejudices to carry the people to whatever length in ſocial improvement he has a mind. But when changes are rapidly introduced, antient opinions ſuddenly overturned; and eſtabliſhed forms openly attacked, the imprudence of the manner is found frequently ſufficient to diſappoint the moſt upright intentions, and to ruin the ſucceſs of the moſt beneficial ſchemes. There is no ſubject, however, in which the precautions of prudence and deliberation are more neceſſary than in tampering with the religious opinions of a country.

Agreeably therefore to theſe principles, to whatever ſyſtem the generality of the ſubjects are found to be attached, that ought to be countenanced with the higheſt degrees of public favour, it ought to be diſtinguiſhed by a legal e-

ſtabliſhment, and by being ſupported at the charge of the community; whilſt every inferior ſect is entitled only to exemption from ſuffering, the protection of common law for their perſons and property and the indulgence of a toleration for their religious opinions.

Nothing ſurely can be more abſurd and injurious than pretences to enlighten the underſtanding, or to perſuade the will of man by means of force and fear; ſociety may nevertheleſs be at ſome times placed in ſuch delicate circumſtances as to make it expedient not only to reſtrain, but abſolutely to prohibit the open profeſſion of particular tenets, and even to enforce the prohibition by the power and ſanction of civil penalties. If it ſhall be found in the firſt place that a great majority of the people entertain a ſtrong, tho' perhaps an ill founded averſion againſt ſome particular ſyſtem of tenets; if in the next place the adherents of that ſect are few in number, but more eſpecially in the laſt place, if theſe hated principles are inconſiſtent with truth, dangerous to the public peace and ſafety of mankind; the Magiſtrate ought in theſe and ſuch caſes, from maxims of prudence and from a regard to public utility, to gratify the minds of his ſubjects, not only by withholding his encouragement from theſe opinions, but alſo by loading the profeſſion of them with the additional weight of penal ſtatutes.

Inſtitutions of this kind are indeed founded only on the imperfections of man and the neceſſities of human ſociety, and are adopted only with the view of preventing a greater evil by ſubmitting to a leſs; they ought therefore to be employed as ſeldom as poſſible; and when recourſe is had to ſuch expedients, with the moſt attentive eye ought the legiſlator to watch the firſt proper opportunity of taking off the ſeverity of laws which unavoidable neceſſity once extorted from him, and the continuance of which can be juſtified only on the ſame inflexible principle. And after the iniquity of theſe ſtatutes has become manifeſt, ſtill it requires the hand of a prudent and experienced ſtateſman to remedy the evil: leſt by an unſeaſonable or raſh attempt to relax the rigor of ſuch inſtitutions, theſe jealous prejudices whence they originally ſprung, and which may have lain long dormant without being extinguiſhed, ſhould be revived with all their antient fervor, and the pain and danger of the cure rendered thereby more diſtreſſing than the diſeaſe itſelf.

In conſideration of theſe things a proper ſituation of public affairs muſt be choſen, a time when few cauſes of diſcontent exiſt, when the force of religious prejudices are weakened, and the minds of men ſoftened and expanded by the progreſs of philoſophy and of the refined arts; when the people repoſe a high degree of confidence in the

integrity and abilities of the legiſlator; and after all it is neceſſary to inſure ſucceſs, that changes be brought about in a very ſlow and deliberate manner.

Theſe uſeful and neceſſary regulations which hold together the fabric of human ſociety, have in many reſpects a foundation not more ſolid than the ſhadowy ſubſtance of common opinion, men receive theſe from father to ſon, and by a fortunate kind of credulity, ſeldom allow themſelves to examine what they ſo readily admit. Any ſudden alteration in public inſtitutions is apt not only to ſhock, but to awaken the attention and to render men more ſenſible of their condition than may in ſome reſpects, be conſiſtent with public utility; nothing therefore can be of a more critical nature in an improved ſtate of ſociety, than by haſty and irregular ſteps to give the machine of government a violent or too rapid motion. It endangers the annihilation of that neceſſary illuſion on which the voluntary ſubmiſſion of the many to the will of the few ultimately reſts; and which muſt be ſupported not only by truth and rectitude, but alſo by exhibiting to the eyes of the vulgar an uniform appearance of wiſdom, prudence and deliberation.

When we come to apply the ſpirit of theſe reflexions to the caſe before us, we find that circumſtances once neceſſitated our anceſtors to enact ſevere and ſanguinary laws againſt the pro-

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feſſors of the Popiſh religion; and we their poſterity, have now embraced a ſcheme to relieve Papiſts from the hardſhips and inconveniences to which they have ſtood ſo long expoſed.

There is not a man, it may ſafely be affirmed, who feels the tender ſentiments of humanity, who has ever taſted the ſweets of perſonal freedom, or of religious liberty, or who has the ſmalleſt ſpark of the gentle ſpirit of the goſpel of Jeſus in his breaſt, who does not wiſh he might ſee all mankind equally free, and every one allowed to worſhip the God of his fathers without moleſtation, in the manner moſt agreeable to his own conſcience, and who does not bewail theſe rigors of fortune, by which a reſtraint of both civil and religious liberty is at ſome times rendered unavoidable; nor can it be ſuppoſed, that there is a man of learning and refinement of underſtanding in Great Britain, however much he may diſapprove of Popery, and wiſh to prevent the ſpreading of that peſtilent hereſy, who would not rejoice to ſee that happy period, when in harmony with the public good he and his Roman Catholic neighbour might be permitted to alleviate the ſufferings and ſolace the ſorrows of life with the comforts of religion. The only queſtion is, how this can be done in conſiſtency with truth and public utility, whether

the preſent be a fit ſeaſon, and the plan adopted proper for that purpoſe?

That dread of Popery with which the minds of many loyal ſubjects are ſtill filled, that diſapprobation of the preſent meaſures with regard to it, which already begins to ſhow itſelf, abundantly prove that there yet remains ſome degree of theſe principles, from which the ſeverity againſt Roman Catholics originally flowed.

The loſs of empire, the ſtaining of the national glory, the precarious ſituation of trade, together with the increaſing load of taxes and of public debts, to which the miſmanagement and diſaſters of an unfortunate Miniſtry, has within the courſe of theſe few years ſubjected the kingdom, are cauſe of diſſatisfaction of ſuch a general and of ſuch an important nature, as leave the people but little able to bear any further provocation.

The ſcheme embraced in favour of Papiſts, is beſides connected with ſome circumſtances peculiarly diſagreeable. It is taken in behalf of a ſect whoſe principles are contrary to truth, whoſe eſtabliſhment is unfriendly to the proſperity of civil ſociety, and whoſe practices have been found on former occaſions dangerous to the peace and ſafety of mankind. That I may keep at the greateſt diſtance from whatever may tend to inflame the minds of the people, or to in-

creaſe diſcontent againſt the preſent meaſures of government, I ſhall not ſo much as enter upon the proof and illuſtration of theſe particulars, which might be drawn in ſo copious a manner from the hiſtory both of our own and of foreign countries; and ſhall paſs over this part of the ſubject with having only named the following facts.

Popery places a great number of perſons in a ſituation for life where they cannot properly aſſiſt either the population or induſtry of their country; a large ſhare of property is ſecreted from the circle of trade and commerce, and ſhut up idle in the hands of Eccleſiaſtics, a regular ſociety is formed in the boſom of the ſtate, receiving laws and inſtitutions from a foreign head, on whom it in a great meaſure depends, and to whom it conſiders its obedience as chiefly due; men are taught to regulate their conduct toward their prince and country according to the capricious humours of an intereſted avaricious foreign prieſt, and to conſider the groſſeſt inſtances of even treachery and perfidy as at leaſt but trivial ſlips, from the criminality of which, their ſpiritual guides can with eaſe not only procure them an ample pardon, but alſo, a full indulgence to perſiſt in the ſame vices for the future.

The dangerous practices again, which have been found either to ariſe directly from theſe

principles, or which have been encouraged by them are but too manifeſt. The priſons they have builded and filled, the engines of torture, they have erected, the gibbets they have raiſed, and the avenging flames they have ſo frequently kindled. The remembrance of theſe mournful days, when the dagger of aſſaſſination wielded by the hand of popiſh Fanatics murdered the moſt illuſtrious perſonages in Europe: The hiſtory of that time, when revenge and cruelty prompted by this ſuperſtition, deluded a mighty prince with the greater part of his ſubjects into the baſeneſs of a treacherous conſpiracy againſt the lives of ſome of the moſt eminent and enlightened of his people. The account of that night of ſhame, when the ſtreets of a great city ran with the innocent blood ſhed by this conſpiracy, and when the genius of Popery might have been heard amidſt the gloom of darkneſs and the work of death inſulting over the bodies of the ſlain: Theſe, together with the ſcenes of ſorrow and of ſlaughter which deſolated lands not ſo far remote, are evidences of the tendency of theſe principles not eaſily refuted, whilſt the exiſtence of the iniquitous court of Inquiſition remains to this day a ſtanding proof, that tho' the violence of Popery be at preſent reſtrained by the gentler manners of the age, it is ſtill the ſame, and afford us but too good ground to dread that the

tenets which with ſo much alacrity kindle an *Autau de fee* at Lisbon, would light up the ſame flame in Scotland were it as much in their power.

Beſides, can it be ſuppoſed, that principles which openly patroniſe all theſe enormities by inculcating upon their votaries, that they are bound to regard no ties however ſacred and ſolemn, towards thoſe whom the church of Rome has once thought proper to ſtigmatiſe with the horrid epithet of *Heretic*; but that the man who deſtroys ſuch, tho' by the means of even fraud, treachery and murder, performs an action acceptable in the ſight of Heaven, and thereby opens to himſelf a certain and direct paſſage into the higheſt manſions of eternal felicity? Is it poſſible that a ſyſtem founded on ſuch principles, and condemned by ſo many evidences, can be agreeable to truth authoriſed by the word of God, or conſiſtent with the public happineſs of mankind?

And yet at a time when a great number of the moſt loyal ſubjects in Great Britain retain a ſtrong averſion againſt this ſect, when the minds of the people are already greatly agitated with many cauſes of juſt diſcontent, the moſt deciſive meaſures are embraced to relieve a ſect falſe in its principles and dangerous in its tendency, from the reſtraint of laws, under which, however,

they felt in this country, at leaſt, but little inconveniency and no actual ſuffering.

To oppoſe theſe reflexions by pleading the doctrine of univerſal freedom is philoſophic puerility. Such a ſcheme has indeed ſomething in it extremely pleaſing to the imagination, and revives the favourite idea of natural liberty, and preſents to the mind the viſionary repreſentation of a rational ſociety carried to perfection: but the beautiful viſion is annihilated by the ſingle queſtion, Is it practicable? An abſolutely free intercourſe of trade, an exemption from the reſtraints of all laws civil and religious might be pleaded for on the ſame ground, and the ſame imperfections of human nature are ſufficient to demonſtrate the futility of every ſuch ſcheme.

'Tis more trifling to alledge, that becauſe the Proteſtant ſyſtem is founded in divine truth, and ſupported by reaſon, it ought not therefore to accept of any aſſiſtance from civil inſtitutions. Whoever ſhould argue, that becauſe the government of Great Britain was at the Revolution founded on the moſt evident principles of truth and public utility, no oath of allegiance ought to have been required; or, becauſe every man has the moſt undoubted right to perſonal ſafety, all defence of civil laws ought to be diſclaimed; he would be thought to reaſon neither as a good

ſubject nor as a prudent man; his argument, notwithſtanding, would be as juſt in every reſpect as that immediately before us.

Nor does it affect the queſtion in hand to ſay that Popery is now greatly altered; and even tho' it were not, its abſurdities and vices can be of little danger in an age ſo much enlightened, and ſo greatly improved as the preſent. That many who profeſs the popiſh religion are men of integrity and virtue I am well aſſured, but that the tenets of Popery remain at this day as they were aſcertained by the fiery and intolerant ſpirit of the council of Trent is alſo certain. It is no doubt true, that men of learning and humanity of temper can be in little danger of falling into either the errors or vices of this ſuperſtition, but it muſt alſo be acknowledged, that there is ſtill a great body of people in this country who fall not under this deſcription: Theſe ſtand in need of the beſt principles to direct their irregular tempers and to improve their unpoliſhed minds. Theſe are the perſons who are in danger of being infected by the errors and vices of Popery, and to expoſe them to ſuch a riſque is neither generous nor ſafe. It is to put deadly weapons in the hand of ignorance and biggotry, it is to add fewel to that flame which may ſome day be extinguiſhed not without the expence of both blood and treaſure. Our fathers experi-

need the truth of this remark, let us learn by their example.

It is not intended by any thing that is here ſaid, ſo much as to inſinuate, that it would be agreeable to any good Proteſtant to ſee the benefits of toleration reſtricted, or to ſee a yoke of civil penalties wreathed about the neck of any religious ſect whatever, on the contrary, let it be extended to the utmoſt, and let civil penalties and reſtrictions be removed from every ſect without exception. Only it muſt ſtill ſeem not a little ſtrange, that ſo much fervency of zeal ſhould appear in behalf of Roman Catholics, and ſuch a deliverance given them not merely from civil penalties, but alſo, from religious reſtraints, whilſt other ſects much leſs obnoxious to the public, and much leſs dangerous in their nature are ſtill left under reſtrictions of the moſt oppreſſive kind. Had relief been previouſly granted to the other, the friends of Roman Catholiciſm might have proceeded with more appearance of juſtice in granting relief to the former.

The wide difference that there is in the preſent ſtate of the Britiſh iſlands ought alſo to be conſidered in this argument. In Ireland the Roman Catholics form a great body of people, in England there are alſo ſome conſiderable families of that perſuaſion; and they, no doubt, claim a proportionable degree of indulgence

from the legiſlator; but in Scotland Roman Catholics ſcarcely exiſt as a ſect, the laws under conſideration therefore can occaſion no actual ſuffering, they operate merely as a defence or preventative. A total reverſal of them in theſe circumſtances, is a meaſure calculated firſt to give being to ſuch a ſect, and then to rear it under the ample ſhade of public indulgence.

Since then the temper of the people, the circumſtances of the times, the character of the ſect in queſtion, and the particular ſtate of Scotland is ſuch, a reverſal of the laws under conſideration can be attended with no advantages, would certainly be productive of ſome inconveniences, and therefore, can be ſupported by no argument founded in ſound politics, nor does there appear to be any inducement whatever for embracing ſuch a ſcheme, eſpecially in this country.

For it is plainly impoſſible to ſuppoſe, that becauſe the independent ſpirit of Proteſtant liberty has been found too refractory to the hand of power, a ſcheme is therefore formed to change it for the mere pliant temper of popiſh ſervility. Such a deſign could never enter into the breaſt of a Britiſh Senator, much leſs take poſſeſſion of the whole legiſlature; it is certainly a falſe light and an undeſigned likeneſs, tho' it muſt be confeſt that a ſyſtem of tenets which

teaches men to ſubmit their religious principles to a foreign tyrant, in ſo far prepares them to ſubmit their civil rights to a domeſtic deſpot.

Beſides the arguments ariſing from a political view of this ſubject, I muſt before I conclude, hint what appears to me of infinitely greater importance, that a regard to the intereſts of religion and the happineſs of mankind ought to engage every ſincere Chriſtian, to exert his utmoſt endeavours to oppoſe the progreſs of principles ſo contrary to Truth, ſo diſhonourable to the religion of JESUS, and ſo deſtructive to the immortal nature of Man, and to employ every juſtifiable means to prevent the Legiſlature from taking any ſteps that may encourage the growth of that ſyſtem of falſhood, or expoſe the lower claſſes of the people to that dangerous temptation, for the higher ranks cannot be tempted.

PROBLEMS.

I.

MAY not the embaraſſed ſtate of public affairs, and the unſkilful hands to which the management of them has for ſome time been entruſted, be partly the cauſe why ſo many Laws, and ſome of them tending to alter the fundamental principles of Britiſh Union have of late been crouded ſo cloſe upon one another?

II.

MAY not a belief that the Miniſtry have brought themſelves into ſuch a ſituation as

not to have it in their power to refuſe any thing, be the cauſe why the friends of Roman Catholicism have choſen the preſent juncture to make ſo large a demand?

III.

May not the plan adopted with reſpect to Papiſts in this country be a part of the ſyſtem already eſtabliſhed in Canada, and may not ſome perſons hope by ſuch inſtitutions to attach the Roman Catholics ſo firmly to their perſons and intereſts as to put it more in their power hereafter to unfold other parts of the ſcheme fully as little for the honour or advantage of Great Britain as the preſent?

IV.

IV.

MAY not the preſent ſcheme of relief have been propoſed with a view to perplex the miniſtry in the ſame manner, as it is alledged the laws againſt Roman Catholics were originally intended?

V.

MAY not an abſolute indifference to all religion be the cauſe of toleration at ſome times as well as the gentle ſpirit of Chriſtian charity; And did not an apoſtate Roman Emperor bring the Chriſtian name nearer the brink of deſtruction by a plan not unlike the ——— than ever it was by open violence?

VI.

Is not Popery the badge of ſlavery throughout the whole of Europe, and has it not from the beginning been at all times found hoſtile to every principle of liberty in the Britiſh conſtitution, and will not the preſent ſcheme tend to inſure that political enemy?

THE END.

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